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[783] 684 671 241

appease the Lord of heaven and earth and to find out the guilty persons.

On the subject of stealing the exhortation of the elders was not to steal, destroy, defraud, or act dishonestly. Such deeds are by no means secret. Even though unconfessed, they become manifest in the ordeal by water and in that of ascending a tree. The God of heaven sees. The Lord of the mountains and hills, "Thi Hko Mü Xa," sees. If one is hungry, one should work, should bend the back. If one wants fish, one should use the hand-net. If one desires game, let one repair to the jungle for it. Families are to be fed in this way, not by stealing or by running into debt. 685 538

A person who had been caught stealing might be let off, if it was his first offense and he restored the stolen property and promised to reform. If, however, he became a confirmed thief, he was sold into slavery. In some parts of the Toungoo district it was not uncommon for one guilty of stealing to pay the penalty with his life. If positive proof was lacking and there was doubt as to his guilt, the ordeal by water was resorted to.

Murder was, of course, utterly condemned in the sayings of the elders, for "man is not like the beasts. He has a Lord and Master. We are the children of Thi Hko, of Y'wa who created us. Therefore, do not kill one another." The murderer will be surrendered to the Lord of the lands and will be put to death. He can not escape. His body will be left naked in the fields, and the vultures will devour it. "These things," the elders declare, "have we seen with our own eyes, and we know them, and they have often happened among us." However, the circumstances under which a murder was committed were taken into account. A homicide at a drunken feast was considered an accident, for it was thought that the one guilty of the crime would not have committed it had he been sober. No cause for an action existed in such a case. 682 538

Men killed while taking part in a foray were to be redeemed, that is, a fine was to be paid for them, unless the leader had been excused from such payment in advance.[4] Likewise, the accidental death of a man during a trading, hunting, or other trip undertaken at the request of another, was chargeable to the latter, because otherwise it would not have occurred. 761 672

The recognized way of bringing to justice an offender who was accused of causing the death of another, was for the near relatives 682 628

[4] See p. 157.

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682 of the latter to take active measures to avenge themselves. A dy-
628 ing father, whose condition was due to the assault of an enemy or who had suffered other injury, would charge his sons to avenge his wrong. The chief and the elders, recognizing the justice of the cause, would further it and join in to punish the guilty inhabitant of another village. As a precaution against a fatal accident or a secret murder, persons were not allowed to have in their possession dangerous poisons gathered from the jungle. Any one guilty of doing so was acting unlawfully and was condemned by the elders to be bound out in the hot sun for three days. He had also to destroy his store of poisonous herbs and to promise never to commit the offense again. After this he might be received again into the village, or he might be sold into slavery. If he was believed guilty of murder, his life was taken.

762 There appears to have been no law against suicide, and perhaps for this reason, as well as others, the practice was once common among the people. Nevertheless, voluntary self-destruction is regarded as an act of cowardice and, though not spoken of as displeasing to the spiritual powers, it prevented an honorable burial from being given to the one guilty of it. Hanging has been the usual method of committing the act among the Karens, while taking poison has been the common means of suicide among the Burmese. Incurable diseases, great disappointment, jealousy, and forcing a young woman to marry some one she dislikes, have been the usual causes of self-murder. Dr. Mason mentions a young man who was able to recall the occurrence of twenty-five suicides in a group of villages within a period of fifteen years. At the present time, probably on account of outside influences, such instances are rare indeed.

Inheritance regulations and customs are not definite or uniform
428 among the Karen; but usually property is divided among the children, the eldest being given a little more than the others and the youngest receiving a slightly smaller share. The widow has no legal right to anything, although she generally succeeds in retaining the use of more or less of the property during her lifetime. Should she marry again, even this quasi-right terminates. The second husband can not appropriate the property of the first, nor can his children share it.

000 It seems hardly necessary to comment on the worthy ideals and fundamental principles of human conduct embodied in the pre-